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More evidence that Transcendental Meditation helps the heart

Transcendental Meditation has been around for many years and is perhaps the most scientifically tested of all forms of meditation. Two studies presented this week add to the evidence that this form of stress reduction benefits people with heart disease and those at high risk for it.

One study, presented on Monday at the American Heart Assn.'s annual meeting, found that heart disease patients who practice TM have almost 50% lower rates of heart attacks, stroke and deaths compared to similar patients who don't practice meditation. The study was funded with a \$3.8-million grant from the federal government and was conducted at the Medical College of Wisconsin in collaboration with the Institute for Natural Medicine and Prevention at Maharishi University of Management in Fairfield, Iowa, a major center of TM research.

The study followed African American men and women over nine years. The participants were randomly assigned to practice the stress-reducing TM technique or attend traditional health education classes on heart disease prevention.

The results of TM were so striking, it was as if the participants who meditated were taking a new class of medications, the authors said.

"Previous research on Transcendental Meditation has shown reductions in blood pressure, psychological stress, and other risk factors for heart disease, irrespective of ethnicity," the lead author of the study, Dr. Robert Schneider, said in a news release. "But this is the first controlled clinical trial to show that long-term practice of this particular stress reduction program reduces the incidence of clinical cardiovascular events."

In the second study, published today in the American Journal of Hypertension, researchers found that TM was an effective tool to reduce blood pressure, anxiety, depression and anger among college students at risk for high blood pressure.

Scientists at American University in Washington, D.C., and Maharishi University randomly assigned 298 students to either learn TM techniques or remain on a waiting list for the class. After three months, the students practicing TM had reductions of 6.3 millimeters of mercury (mm Hg) in systolic blood pressure and 4.0 mm Hg in diastolic. The reductions translate to a 52% lower risk of developing hypertension in later years. The students also showed improvements in psychological distress and coping.

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